

USDA Says "No Downers" in School Lunch Program

This summer, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) reviewed and revised its policy regarding the purchase of ground beef for the National School Lunch Program (beginning in School Year 2000-2001) and other federal food and nutrition programs, and it has taken a major step in the direction of ending the downed animal trade. According to an agency statement, "USDA will no longer accept ground beef that includes product from non-ambulatory cattle, commonly known as 'downers.'"



Carcasses originating from cattle which must be processed in accordance with *FSIS Directive 6900.1R1 - Humane Handling of Disabled Livestock*, issued November 2, 1998, must be segregated to assure that the product from these carcasses is not included in the USDA purchased ground beef."

This development shows a growing consensus—even among industry and government officials—that the marketing and slaughter of downed animals causes intolerable animal suffering and poses an unnecessary risk to human health.

Letters to FDA Urgently Needed!

Letters are urgently needed to end the downed animal trade. Please write to the Food and Drug Administration's Dockets Management Branch to urge that they grant our petition to prohibit the slaughter of downed animals—docket number 98P-0151/CP1. It is critical that you include the docket number in your comment.

Contact:

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Some points to make include:

- Animals who are too sick or injured even to stand should not be allowed to enter the human food chain.
- In addition to posing an increased risk for bacterial contamination, there is evidence that some downed animals may be afflicted with a form of BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy or "Mad Cow Disease"), a disease which has been linked to a fatal human illness (CJD or Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease).
- It is practically impossible to move downed animals humanely, and they are typically pushed with tractors or dragged with chains—inhumane processes which cause injuries ranging from bruises and abrasions, to broken bones and torn ligaments.
- Downed animals comprise a very small percentage of animals slaughtered, and prohibiting their marketing will cause no undue economic hardship.
- Industry experts have estimated that 90% of downed animals can be prevented with better care and handling. Removing the market for downed animals will provide an incentive for the industry to prevent downed animals in the first place.



THE WELFARE OF CALVES IN VEAL PRODUCTION: A Summary of the Scientific Evidence

INTRODUCTION

Veal is a light-colored meat which comes from young calves who are raised on a restricted diet and whose movements are severely limited. The calves are fed an all-liquid milk substitute which is deficient in iron and fiber. It is designed to cause anemia which produces the pale-colored flesh sold as "white" veal. In addition, veal calves are confined in crates which are just two feet wide, and they are unable to walk or exercise throughout their entire lives (Reece & Hotchkiss, 1987). This confinement prevents muscle development to keep the meat tender, and it hastens weight gain since the calves do not expend calories exercising. No straw or other bedding is provided due to the fear that the calves may eat the straw, which would make their flesh darker in color (Stevenson, 1999).

About 750,000 calves are raised for veal every year in the United States (American Veal Association, 2000). Most veal calves are unwanted males from dairy farms, who are typically slaughtered before 5 months of age (Le Neindre, 1993). Unlike calves raised by the beef industry, who usually nurse from their mothers for about 6 months, calves raised for veal are removed from mothers immediately after birth. They commonly experience the stress of minimal colostrum (first milk) intake (Reece & Hotchkiss, 1987) as well as isolation from the dam and other calves. Veal crates are "an extreme example of maximum close individual confinement with significant curtailment of a variety of natural behaviors" (Friend & Dellmeier, 1988).

Methods used to produce veal have been widely criticized as inhumane, and veal consumption in the United States has dropped significantly in recent decades. A June 2000 poll of 1264 adults across the United States conducted by Zogby International for Farm Sanctuary found that nearly 60% of the respondents never ate veal while another 30% only ate veal a few times a year. In Europe, the use of veal crates and the anemic diet have been banned for humane reasons, and the European Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee has recommended that calves be kept in groups, have sufficient room to lie down comfortably, and be given a properly balanced diet (Europa, 1996).

Scientific evidence suggests that the restricted diet and the intensive confinement used to produce "white" veal impairs both the physical and psychological well-being of calves.

PHYSICAL DISORDERS

Calves, like other animals, need wholesome food and exercise to achieve optimal health. When calves raised for veal are denied these basic needs, they suffer from various physical maladies including: abnormal gut development, stomach ulceration, physical discomfort, impaired locomotion, and a greater susceptibility to disease.

Abnormal Gut Development

The veal calves' all-liquid diet which is deficient in iron and fiber is a major cause of poor welfare in itself. The European Union's Scientific Veterinary Committee's 1995 report *Welfare of Calves* cited much scientific literature and concluded that a diet deficient in roughage and iron can lead to serious maladies for the calves and cause abnormal gut development (Stevenson, 1999). In fact, it stated that calves fed a milk diet with no solid feed would die before adulthood (Stevenson, 1999). According to Wiepkema et al. (1987), the absence of roughage in the diet of the milk-fed calf "hinders the development of rumination [digestion] and associated processes."

Stomach Ulceration

The restricted diet may also cause stomach ulceration in calves. Welchman and Baust (1987) found that ulceration of the abomasum (a stomach-like organ) is common in veal calves slaughtered at three to five months of age. They suggest that lesions found in two-thirds of the calves were primarily associated with the consumption of milk replacer. It has also been hypothesized that stress can contribute to the development of stomach ulcers as discussed below.

Physical Discomfort

The limitation of space that a crate poses is a major welfare problem (Le Neindre, 1993). The standard size of veal crates is not sufficient for the calves to lie down normally, and they are forced to assume abnormal and uncomfortable positions. In a 1991 study by Le Neindre et al., calves in small pens spent more time with four legs bent and less time lying with all four legs stretched than those in large



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